

March is Women's History Month
Spotlight on SC's Own Eliza Lucas Pinckney

Eliza Lucas Pinckney was perhaps the nation's first important agriculturist, and ran three South Carolina plantations at sixteen

by Myra Jones, Soil Scientist, Laurens Field Office, and Federal Women's Program Manager, SC Civil Rights Committee

I am certain you have all heard of the following individuals:

Charles Pinckney – a prominent planter, lawyer, politician and Chief Justice;

Thomas Pinckney – a Revolutionary War officer, later a general and the United States Minister to Spain and Great Britain; and

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney – a general in the Revolutionary War and a signer of the United States Constitution.

However, have you ever heard of Eliza Lucas Pinckney?

She was the wife of Charles Pinckney and mother of Charles Cotesworth, Thomas and a daughter Harriott. Eliza not only raised remarkable children but she also played a major role in South Carolina's economy at the time through her role in agriculture!

Eliza was formally trained at a finishing school in England where botany was her favorite subject. After moving to South Carolina as a teenager with her family, her father soon left her completely in charge of three plantations when he was called back to Antigua. From Antigua, her father sent her some indigo seeds. She spent numerous years perfecting these seeds and devised a method of making blocks of indigo cakes for dye. Eliza then shared all of her research with neighboring farmers. This helped to make indigo a major cash crop since rice had been overproduced.

Throughout Pinckney's life she experimented with other agricultural ventures such as hemp, flax and she even planted a fig orchard. She also revived the silk culture in the Lowcountry. Eliza was a very smart and innovative lady who taught her younger sister and her children as well as black children to read and write. She studied music and art, wrote many letters, and studied enough law to draft legal wills for area residents.

She died in 1793 and was buried in Philadelphia where she was receiving medical treatment. Most prestigiously, President George Washington requested to serve as a pallbearer at her funeral. More recently, Eliza was inducted into the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame in 1989 becoming the first woman so honored!

March is Women's History Month and this year's theme is "Writing Women Back Into History. I hope you will take time to learn more about Eliza Lucas Pinckney, as well as other outstanding women that had a positive impact on our country.

The Federal Women's Program (FWP) is an integral part of the overall equal opportunity program at NRCS. It is coordinated through the National Federal Women's Program Manager (NFWPM), who serves as the principal staff advisor to the Director of the Civil Right Division on legislation, policies, employment and program issues impacting women. To contact Myra, email her at myra.jones@sc.usda.gov .